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6 September 1984

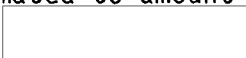
NOTE TO: Hal Ford, NIO/AL
FROM: David B. Low, NIO/AL 
SUBJECT: Issue for DCI/NIO Discussion

The Islamic Bomb: Chemical Rather than Nuclear?


Iraq employed riot control agents against Iranian forces in July 1982 and began using mustard agent in August 1983.  1984, Iraqi aircraft dropped bombs containing nerve agent on Iranian troops. This was the first overt use by any country of nerve gas in a combat situation.

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Iraq has over the last several years developed a substantial domestic CW production capability. CIA presently estimates that Iraq is capable of producing at least two tons per day of mustard agent and two tons per day of nerve agent. The Iraqi stockpile was recently estimated to amount to 165 agent tons of mustard and 55 agent tons of nerve. 

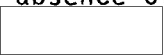
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This brings to 16 the total number of countries having an offensive chemical warfare capability. In addition to the growth in number over the last 20 years, there also has been a dramatic shift in nations possessing offensive CW capability from the industrialized to the developing nations, primarily in the Middle East and East Asia. 

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This proliferation, coupled with apparent international tolerance for CW weapons use in local conflicts, increases the probability that chemical weapons will be used more frequently in the future and complicates the ability of the U.S. to conclude an effective chemical weapons treaty. In addition, it increases the likelihood of terrorist acquisition and use. 

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The Iraqi capability, in particular, raises significant regional questions. What will Iraq do with its stockpile and production capabilities after the war with Iran has subsided? Will Iraq sell agent to friendly neighbors? Will it conduct research on more sophisticated agents or delivery systems? One can even speculate that Iraq perceives its domestic production capability as the cornerstone of an Islamic deterrent to the Israeli threat in the absence of having been able to develop a nuclear weapons capability. 

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cc: VC/NIC
NIO/NESA

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